

4. We're Expecting: How's the Father Doing?

You may know that the Christmas story is only found in two of the gospels: Matthew and Luke. Mark skips right over Jesus' birth and childhood. He starts with John the Baptist, when Jesus was already a grown man. So does the Gospel of John. Matthew and Luke tell the story of Jesus' miraculous conception and his birth. The stories they tell are different in many ways. Part of the difference is that Luke tells the story from the perspective of Mary, and Matthew tells the story from Joseph's perspective.

Luke tells us that an angel appeared to Mary and told her before it happened that she would become pregnant with the Son of God. But Matthew tells us that nobody got around to telling Joseph. Mary didn't tell him. No angel told him. It wasn't until someone saw Mary, probably at her cousin Elizabeth's house, and Mary was clearly showing. You can imagine how upset Joseph when this person told him that his fiancée was pregnant. By law, he should have taken Mary before the elders, where she would have been tried and stoned to death. But he didn't want to do that. So, he decided to quietly break the engagement and let her marry the baby's father.

Then, of course, the angel came to him in a dream with the astounding news that Mary's baby was God's child and that he was to marry her and raise the child as his own. I wonder how Joseph felt about raising a child who wasn't his own.

One time a boy was giving a talk to his Sunday School class about the life of Jesus. He said, "Jesus grew up to be a carpenter, because, in those days, boys always had the same job as their fathers, and Joseph was a carpenter. But Joseph wasn't really his father. So, Jesus decided to quit being a carpenter and become God like his real father."

There are so many things wrong with that statement, theologically, that I will not even begin to try to correct them all, not the least of which is the idea that being God was a career change for Jesus. But the one thing I do want to say something about is the statement that Joseph wasn't really Jesus' father. Is it accurate to say that Joseph wasn't really Jesus' father?

In order to answer that question we have to ask another question: What does it really mean to be a father?

And to start answering that question, we need to remember something: Every baby is a child of God. They are simply entrusted to us by God for a time. And God can entrust a child to our care in many ways.

When each of our children were born, Becky and I prayed together and said, "This child is yours, O God. We thank you for entrusting this child to our care. We will do all we can to love and care for this child, until this child comes to know who its true Father is. And when the time comes, we will return this child to you, knowing that your love and care is far greater than ours."

I would encourage every parent and every grandparent to pray that prayer. Even though we may be fathers and mothers, grandfathers and grandmothers, our children are

not our possessions. They do not belong to us in the sense that we own them. They are human beings, entrusted to our care for a time. They belong to God.

Can you imagine how difficult it is for God to entrust the care of God's children to someone else?

Most of you know that my son and his family have been visiting with us. They were in the process of relocating from Missouri to Albany, New York. They are buying a home, and the closing took longer than they expected. We thought they would be with us about a week and a half. It ended up being four weeks. It was wonderful. We got to enjoy our grandson. And we had the opportunity to get to know our new little granddaughter. She turned three months old while they were with us.

Now, my son and his wife are wonderful, loving parents. But they don't have the wisdom and experience that I have gained over the years. I just know that I could do a terrific job of raising my grandchildren.

But, for some reason, when my kids left, they insisted on taking my grandchildren with them. I find myself having to trust my children to take good care of my grandchildren. And I do. As I say, they are great parents. But it's still hard to let go of those grandchildren.

How much harder must it have been for God. We talk about needing to have faith in God. We must not forget that God has to have faith in us as well. God entrusted the care of his Beloved Son to Joseph and Mary.

And Joseph took good care of Jesus.

When the Wise Men completed their journey and found Jesus, they warned Joseph that they had made the mistake of going to see Herod first. They assumed the star they had seen telling of the newborn king of Israel was announcing the birth of Herod's son. They didn't realize that Herod was paranoid about any threat to his throne and would kill anyone, including his own son, who he suspected of trying to dethrone him. The news that a star in heaven was proclaiming that a new king of Israel had been born was very bad news to Herod, and he was determined to get rid of this new little king. The Wise Men figured all this out and sneaked away from Herod, but not before they had told him the baby was born in Bethlehem.

When the Wise Men came to Bethlehem and found Jesus, they told Joseph of their mistake and warned him that Herod's soldiers wouldn't be far behind them.

Joseph could have said, "Hey, the kid's not mine. It's not my problem." But he didn't. Jesus was his kid. God had entrusted Jesus to his care. He was ready to do whatever it took to keep him safe. Joseph immediately packed up Mary and Jesus and left his family and his friends and his home and took them to a far away place, where Herod could not find them. He took them to Egypt, a strange and foreign land, where he almost certainly struggled to provide for his family. He did not return to Israel until he had heard that Herod had died. And even then, he went to Nazareth, an isolated little town close to the northern border of Israel, far from the palaces of Herod's son and successor.

Joseph made great sacrifices for Jesus. He made them because he really was Jesus' father, even if Jesus was conceived by the Holy Spirit.

Joseph may not have been Jesus' biological father, but he was really Jesus' father. Being a father or a mother is a matter of the heart, not DNA. Joseph was really

Jesus' father, because he loved him as his son. That's what really makes a father, and that is what really makes a mother—Love.

On the night when Christ was born, Joseph understood that Jesus was God's Son. But Joseph knew that this was really his son also, because God had entrusted him to his care. Yes, Joseph was really his father.

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